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Missouri Coalition for the Environment: Experts Brief Missouri Public Officials About Nuclear Weapons Waste And Landfill Fire Risks At Republic Services' West Lake/Bridgeton Landfill

ST. LOUIS, March 15, 2013 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- Community, Environmental, Labor Coalition Presents Demands

Two independent experts briefed public officials from the St. Louis region today about their assessment of the risks posed by the fire and nuclear weapons wastes at the West Lake Landfill in Bridgeton, Mo. The landfill sits in an urban area in the Missouri River floodplain. The landfill is owned and operated by Republic Services [NYSE: RSG] - a multi-billion dollar waste company based in Arizona.

Republic's landfill has been in the news recently due to citizen complaints about persistent stench, the expanding underground fire, a recent explosion, and the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) investigation of radiation levels and groundwater contamination.

The EPA announced this week that it has detected radiation at the site while flying its anti-terrorism ASPECT plane overhead, but has not yet reported any details. The ASPECT plane was recently used to scan President Obama's Inauguration and the Super Bowl for chemical traces that might indicate a dirty bomb or other chemical threat[i]. Public officials representing communities that surround the Republic Services-owned landfill heard testimony about the risks that the currently expanding landfill fire poses to residents in the St. Louis area, especially in the presence of untreated nuclear weapons wastes at the site.

Radioactive wastes dumped at the West Lake Landfill in 1973 sit in the Missouri River floodplain with no protective barriers between the wastes and the groundwater. The site is located 8 river miles upstream from where drinking water is pulled for more than 300,000 North St. Louis County residents.

The EPA has jurisdiction over the radiological contamination while the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has jurisdiction over the remainder, including the underground landfill fire.

Bob Criss, the first expert to speak, is Director of the Stable Isotope Laboratory at Washington University in St. Louis and a Missouri River expert. Criss provided an analysis of the radioactive segment of the landfill.

"Neither the nature of the radioactive wastes, nor relevant levels of background radiation, nor the scale of groundwater migration and contamination have been adequately characterized," Criss said. "All are needed before appropriate remediation can be planned, and it is inexcusable that so little is known after more than 30 years of study."

"Few things are as absurd as dumping almost 9,000 tons of waste containing radionuclides, in an unlined landfill, in a floodplain, in a major metropolitan area," Criss said.

Of the several areas contaminated with nuclear weapons wastes in St. Louis, the West Lake Landfill Superfund Site is the only site that remains untouched. The Army Corps of Engineers has already removed more than 1 million cubic yards of contaminated materials with several years left before completion.

Peter Anderson, the second speaker, is Executive Director of the Center for a Competitive Waste Industry. He explained that, almost always, underground landfill fires cannot

be put out, precisely because they are deep, like coal mine fires. Instead, they rage uncontrolled for 10 or 20 years or more, degrading and destroying critical safety systems and leading to the release of dangerous compounds into the air and groundwater.

For the past nine years a major uncontrolled underground fire has raged at Republic's Countywide Landfill in Ohio, where the company's public assurances were later demonstrated as false. In both Ohio and Missouri, Anderson said, "the landfill fires began due to the incompetence of the company."

"As a consequence of what I feel is Republic's gross negligence here in Bridgeton, Missouri and given the complete lack of hard data about how much flammable material is in the quarry pit to speed the spread of the fire, as well as how far the radiological wastes have migrated in the direction of the fire, there is a very real prospect that lethal material will be released into the atmosphere and groundwater," Anderson said.

"Moreover, in view of recent methane explosions and the fact that pools of methane gas seem to lie in proximity to jet fuels and other accelerants, there is the non-trivial possibility of a dirty bomb scenario," Anderson said.

"Given Republic's deplorable track record, we need public authorities to hire top experts to conduct rigorous independent testing, and take charge of directing remedies, which should be billed back to the company, as well as assurances paid down for future costs to protect the public from future risks," Anderson said.

The event was organized by a coalition comprised of Missouri Coalition for the Environment, Missouri Jobs with Justice, and Joint Council 13 of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Marvin Kropp, President of Teamsters Joint Council 13, thanked the assembled officials, and introduced the speakers and coalition members.

"Teamsters and their family members live and work at and around the Bridgeton landfill, and we have members who work for Republic across the country," Kropp said. "Our experience is that Republic can't be trusted - it is hurting working families and communities across the country. We want to see them protected."

Jobs with Justice's Joan Suarez presented the coalition's demands of EPA and DNR: 1. Ensure public safety through solid independent analysis; 2. Enhance public engagement and transparency; and 3. Guarantee taxpayer protection by charging Republic and other responsible parties all present and future costs associated with protecting the public.

"Workers, communities and Missouri taxpayers shouldn't be saddled with the costs of Republic's negligence," Suarez said. (See below for the demands in detail).

"We have been concerned about the radioactive contamination at the West Lake Landfill for more than ten years," said Ed Smith of the Missouri Coalition for the Environment.

"The emergence of a landfill fire over the last two years shows that unexpected problems can always arise. This is one of countless reasons why the radioactive wastes need to be removed."

The Coalition commended Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for realizing its initial testing efforts were insufficient and seeking to hire outside contractors, at Republic's expense.

"It is clear that a more sophisticated, independent testing and intervention regime, with full disclosure, is needed," Smith said. "We will continue to actively engage to make sure that the highest standards are upheld, community interests are heard, and Republic Services and other responsible parties are held accountable."

The Coalition's demands are as follows:

1. **PUBLIC SAFETY THROUGH INDEPENDENT ANALYSIS:** At Republic's expense, DNR and EPA needs to hire fully independent, highly qualified air, water and fire experts, capable of testing for all relevant compounds of concern; DNR also needs to engage experts to assess Republic's plan of action, review data and recommend whatever additional steps are needed to:

- stop the landfill fire and secure the general population from the chemical and radioactive
- exposures.
- protect the public, local businesses and landfill workers from negative health and economic
- impacts arising out of Republic's negligence.

2. **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND TRANSPARENCY:** DNR and EPA should continue to make emissions data and data gathering techniques public, and maintain close contact with fence-line communities. At Republic's expense, DNR should fund the unpaid Community Advisory Group so it can hire its own experts, regularly communicate

with all residents, and sustain normal administrative costs associated with keeping track of Republic's clean-up efforts.

3. TAXPAYER PROTECTION: To protect the taxpayer, Republic Services needs to pay all present and future costs associated with independent testing, analysis, prevention and remediation of the Bridgeton/West Lake landfill fire that are sustained by DNR or other stakeholders.

[i] Preparedness Videos and Slideshows | Science Notebook | US EPA <http://www.epa.gov/epahome/sciencenb/preparedness/videos-and-slideshows.html> Climb aboard our ASPECT plane to see how EPA collects data on the fly. ... device (RDD or dirty bomb) or improvised nuclear detonation (IND) attack. ASPECT ...

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